

Marine Corps Retention

ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Although the Marine Corps continues to enjoy success reenlisting our “best and brightest”, we expect the FY06 “reenlistment battle” to be one of our most difficult manpower challenges. The continued strain on the operating forces combined with the draw of our greatest asset, the individual Marine, presents a significant one-two punch. It will be the responsibility of all leaders within the officer and enlisted chains to ensure we are educated and prepared to meet this evolving challenge. The dynamics of our manpower system must match skills and grades to our Commanders’ needs throughout the operating forces. The Marine Corps endeavors to attain and maintain stable, predictable retention patterns. However, civilian opportunities abound for our Marines as private employers actively solicit our young Marine leaders for lucrative private sector employment. Intangibles such as the desire to serve our nation and the satisfaction received from leadership responsibilities provided in our Corps are a large part of the reason we retain the dedicated men and women who choose to continue to be active duty Marines after their initial commitment.

The Marine Corps remains mindful of enlisted retention. We are also cognizant that our retention “appetite” is larger than our budget. In order for the Marine Corps to reenlist its required first-term Marines within their original primary military occupational specialty (MOS) and to minimize lateral moves or prior service enlistments, the Selective Reen-

listment Bonus (SRB) budget will need to increase significantly. Because retention of MOS experience and proficiency are cornerstones to a strong Corps, we will make every effort to retain our best people by seeking greater funding for the critical SRB program. Currently, the Marine Corps has allotted \$53.6M in FY06 (Presidential Budget) in new SRB payments to assist our reenlistment efforts with an additional \$31.4M being requested through supplemental funding. These payments, totaling \$85M, have been split 67/33 between the First Term Alignment Plan (FTAP) and STAP, respectively. The SRB program has significantly aided our reenlistment rates and improved retention for some of our critical skill shortages. However, shortages persist in some highly technical specialties, such as intelligence, data communications experts, and air command and control technicians. In FY06, we are continuing to pay lump sum bonus payments, thus increasing the net present value of the incentive and positively influencing highly qualified, yet previously undecided, personnel.

We are a young force, making accessions a chief concern for manpower readiness. Of the 159,292 active duty enlisted force, over 24,000 are still teenagers – 107,000 are on their first enlistment. In FY05, we reenlisted approximately 25 percent of our first term eligible population. These 5,979 first term Marines represent 100 percent of the Marines we need to transition into the career force, and marks the tenth consecutive year that the Corps will have achieved this objective.

With the support of SRB dollars, we were able to achieve our first term retention requirement with an MOS match rate of 96 percent.

The Subsequent Term Alignment Plan (STAP) was introduced in FY02 to focus on retaining experience in our Career Force Marines. In FY05, we continue to enjoy tremendous success with a 133 percent reenlistment rate. The decreasing trend in continuation rates has been stabilized and will continue to stabilize our FTAP requirement to achievable levels. Due to the strong draw from the civilian sector, we elevated the importance of our career force by paying greater atten-

tion to retaining them as well as expending approximately 35 percent of our SRB resources to keep this experience level on par with previous years.

This year we continue to see smaller first term non-Expiration of Active Service (EAS) attrition, similar to the lower attrition experienced in fiscal year 2004. The number of Marines separated for misconduct and physical disability problems remains lower than in past years. The lower misconduct rate is due in part to high recruiting and retention standards and high operational tempo currently in effect. However, as this high In the larger context, we are pleased with our retention



situation but remain cautious about the future. We anticipate meeting our aggregate personnel objectives in FY06, and we continue to successfully maintain the appropriate balance of first term and career Marines. The management of youth and experience in our enlisted ranks is critical to our success and we are extremely proud of our accomplishments.

OFFICERS

The Marine Corps officer retention goal is to retain the “best and fully qualified” officers, in the right grades, with the right skills to provide the capabilities required in the operating forces. Historically, the aggregate officer retention rate is 90.8 percent. Currently, the Marine Corps is on pace with meeting its retention goals within the officer corps. Regardless, Manpower planners continue to look for indicators that would show a trend toward higher attrition in future

years. Although overall officer retention is excellent, shortages do exist in certain grades and skills, requiring careful management and innovative solutions.

The retention forecast for the officer corps in the near term is consistent with the historical average. The Marine Corps has active programs in place, both monetary and non-monetary, to ensure officer retention remains high. Monetary tools already implemented include Aviation Continuation Pay (ACP) and Law School Education Debt Subsidy (LSEDS). Non-monetary programs include voluntary lateral moves, inter-service transfers, and Return to Active Duty (RAD). All of these programs provide incentives to officers for continued service even in the face of significant operational tempo, while allowing flexibility to Manpower planners to meet requirements across the Marine Corps total force.